

THE THREE CULTURES SQUARE

IN TLATELOLCO, ESCENE OF THE

II DIALOGUE FORUM REGARDING

THE MEXICO-EU TREATY

LAURA BECERRA POZOS*

It was more than two years before the II Dialogue Forum between civil society and the representatives of the Mexican government and the European Union could take place. The latter two had, in 1997, signed the Mexico European Union Free Trade Agreement (MEFTA) that came into effect in 2000. The first Consultation Forum took place in Brussels in November 2002 as a result of the demands by civil society organizations and social networks on both sides that, for many years, had considered that the MEFTA should take a different path and take into consideration the actors and sectors of society directly affected or involved in the question of integration.

The *Dialogue Forum between Civil Society and the Institutions of the Mexican Government and the European Union*, that took place on the 28 February and 1 March in the Three Cultures Square in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, was rooted in previous monitoring and analysis efforts motivated by the conviction of various civil and social organizations for the need to generate a space for dialogue and consultation regarding the impacts of the MEFTA on our societies, commercial relationships, human rights and the environment. Because of this, before it came

The clearest example of this and motive for tense debate in the forum, was the project, "Integrated and Sustainable Social Development" that was signed with the government of the State of Chiapas, in the Lacandona jungle, that did not take the communities into account and that furthermore, aggravated the social and environmental conditions as well as the internal conflict.

into force and particularly, in the first Consultation Forum in Brussels, we offered a variety of reflections and proposals, fundamentally regarding: the formalization of participation mechanism for the various social sectors and actors; the implementation of a Social Observatory and the guarantee to accomplish the democratic clause

Some differences are noted between the first and second Forum. In Brussels, the Mexican government representative resisted the notion of a Consultation Forum with civil society, while the representatives of the European Union, took on board this format. In the second forum, this "confusion" was no longer an issue; however the idea of a consultation was changed to "dialogue". The relevance of this is that even while the organization of the forums had been accepted, their institutionalization was not, based on the argument that the Agreement did not contemplate them. As a result, at the conclusion of the forum, the Mexican and European governmental representatives "took note" of our evaluations and proposals in order to review them at a later stage. In this way, we waited two years for detailed and concrete answers from the Joint Committee regarding the proposals put forward by Mexican and European Union civil society organizations in Brussels.

For the II Dialogue Forum, Mexican and European Union civil society organizations undertook a process prior to the interaction with government representatives in

* Institutional Sustainability Coordinator

order to agree on the format, themes and reach of the Forum. This created a precedent for the route that the consultation would follow, even though not all the expectations of the civil society were met¹. Despite the presence of the Mexican president at the inauguration and his opening speech welcoming the participation of civil society in which he began with "welcome to democratic Mexico... welcome to the Mexico of change", the daily facts and the official response at the close of the Forum did not reflect to his opening words.

The second Dialogue Forum began with an evaluation of the Agreement by Manuel Luna Calderón, official² from the Economic Secretary who alluded especially to investments and trade, specifically those that represented advantages and profits for the country and congratulated the existence of more than six thousand companies with European capital. For his part, Tomás Duplá del Moral of External Services for Latin America for the European Union, shared the view of his Mexican counterpart, as well as emphasizing the importance of the political and cooperative dimension of the Agreement, and insisted on the necessity to further dialogue and the definition of plans of action.

The various perception of civil society organizations were put forward with ad-

dresses³ that made reference to the asymmetries between Mexico and the majority of the countries that form part of the EU, the fact that foreign investment has not resulted in the expected benefits to the national economy and that cooperation has not grown substantially, following the signing of the Agreement. They highlighted that none of the mechanisms for civil society participation had been concretized despite the proposal for a Mixed Consultation Committee that the Agreement itself recognizes and the approval of a Mexican Economic and Social Council, an initiative presented in the previous Forum and that has been discussed in the Senate of the Republic. The human rights violations of workers employed by European companies are not even considered as a theme in the evaluation of the Agreement.

For the EU, the impacts or benefits of the Agreement have been very favorable: "The Global Agreement and the ARPPIs have been a total success for European capital, acquiring the controlling majority of banking shares (52.3%), captación (53.9%), credit portfolio (52%), Public Sector external electricity debt (52%), becoming the second creditor of PEMEX (20.6%), and the second creditor (39%), after Canada-United States (68%), of the global debt of the Mexican Public Sector.

Trade, in the framework of the Agreement, has deepened the asymmetries and the Mexican trade balance. Comparing the time in which the agreement has been in force (July 2000-November 2004) "with exactly the same period of time previous to the Agreement, Mexican exports increased only 30.09% while importations increased 59.15% and the balance of deficit grew almost 78%!"⁴

The cooperation component of the agreement has not been justly valued by either the Mexican or European governments. As mentioned previously, no changes in priorities or form have been noted, in addition to not having fulfilled, neither in time or form, the commitment-obligation to consult those directly affected, the eventual beneficiaries of the projects. The clearest example of this and motive for tense

¹ We refer to the duration, the time allocated to the addresses of only 5 minutes, the level of responsibility of officials that represented the Mexican government, amongst others.

² General Director for Europe and the FTAA, Mexican Federal Government Secretary of Economy.

³ See addresses in www.sre.gob.mx/uaos

⁴ "Evaluation and perspective in front of the Free Trade Agreement Mexico European Union" Alberto Arroyo y Alejandro Villamar, María Atilano (RMALC); Mareen Mayer (Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez), Manuel Pérez Rocha y Norma Castañeda (DECA, Equipo Pueblo)

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debate in the forum, was the project, "Integrated and Sustainable Social Development" that was signed with the government of the State of Chiapas, in the Lacandona jungle, that did not take the communities into account and that furthermore, aggravated the social and environmental conditions as well as the internal conflict.

The European Commission affirmed that the cooperation priorities had been defined and assured that the economic Agreement had helped to diversify Mexico into a growing economy that therefore led to "a more mature and complex cooperation, in other words, one in which very soon Mexico will no longer receive resources for development..."⁵

The project for cooperation 2007-2013, presented in the Forum, made it clear that decisions have been taken, that the components of the Agreement will not be diversified, that the amounts will not be substantially increased and that the Document for Assistance to the country had not been discussed with the Mexican counterparts. This generated tension between the government representatives and inhibited the coming to an explicit agreement regarding a consultation with civil society. It was only agreed to disseminate the information.

In a day and a half, it was possible to present conclusions and proposals regarding the four themes under discussion: Evaluation of Mexican-EU relations; Balance, perspectives and priorities for cooperation; social cohesion and the Institutionalization of the Dialogue Forum between Civil society and government institutions. Despite the richness and directness of the conclusions, the Mexican government representative's reply was broad, replete with generalities and lacked concrete commitments, apart from that to revise what had been said by the 300 members of Mexican and European civil society in the next Joint Committee meeting in May. This was done in the absence of the Secretary for External Affairs who did not arrive to the closing as previously expected.

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Amongst the proposals, is highlighted the insistence to institutionalize the Dialogue Forum as a strategic matter and expression of joint responsibility, joint design and transparency. Dialogue was identified as needing to be a continuous process that should contribute to the formalization of citizen participation. The importance of installing a Mixed Consultation Committee was reiterated as well as the implementation of a Social and Economic Council that overcomes the current logic of representation in Mexico and recognizes the plurality of the country.

It was suggested that the perspectives regarding Mexican and European social cohesion be modified and that the creation of social capital be prioritized. For this reason, in the inaugural ceremony, 30 organizations from civil society demanded "a true Agreement for Sustainable Development"⁶, although in order to achieve this, it would be necessary to renegotiate the Agreement, taking into account its asymmetries and starting from the regulation of the market to limit free of market forces and seek to strengthen nation states.

The demand that Mexico and the European Union respond to the proposal to give

the democratic clause enforceability and justiciability with regard to human rights, is also highlighted, fundamentally given the impact of trade and investment. "...in accordance with the primacy of human rights, proclaimed in the United Nations Declaration (103), the principal responsibility of States is the respect, promotion and guarantee of human rights above mercantile rights"⁷.

Finally, a commitment for the Third Dialogue Forum to take place before the Vienna Summit was demanded, even while it is expected to have answers from the Joint Council long before its verification, as promised in this second meeting.

While recognizing the advances made, the very fact of the Forum being one of them, that implicitly credits civil society as partners in dialogue, we are still far from a political maturity that recognizes and respects the perceptions of the society, that involves, in a systematic way, organizations of civil society in the monitoring and evaluation of impacts, that formalizes the proposed mechanisms for participation, and that presents a common agenda for government and civil society favoring national interests and sustainable development.

The traditional and historic Three Cultures Plaza in Tlatelolco, host to the Dialogue Forum, and the scene of dialogue, internal conflicts and repression, was not enough to reach agreements and concrete commitments. It was hoped to be able to write, in modern history, that it was there that agreements were forged between government and civil society for the common good, for more equitable relations between diverse countries that contribute to development and democracy.

⁵ Tomás Duplá del Moral, Director General of External Services for Latin America, European Comisión in the Dialogue Forum

⁶ "Position of Mexican Civil Organizations". Statement read by Norma Castañeda of DECA, Equipo Pueblo at the inauguration of the Forum, in the name of 30 civil society organizations.

⁷ Ibid.